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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 FRANKFURT 008521

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SUBJECT: FRANKFURT AIRPORT MANAGEMENT DISPUTES MEDIA
REPORTS OF SECURITY LAPSES

REF: FROATS-SILER-TULENKO E-MAIL/MEDIA TRANSCRIPT

(MAY 27)

Classified By: Consul General Peter W. Bodde, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Over the past few months, German media outlets, on a number of occasions, have reported negatively on Frankfurt Airport (Fraport) customs enforcement and its control of restricted areas. In a meeting with consulate representatives, senior Fraport officials said the airport is 100-percent secure and blamed the reports on labor disputes. TSA and DHS-ICE representatives believe that Fraport provides

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fully adequate security. In reaction to the media attention, Fraport plans to introduce stricter controls on its (over 40,000) identification badges. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) Pol/Econ officer met with Fraport board member and head of External Relations Volker Zintel and Peter Dienstbach (Senior Vice President for Traffic and Terminal Management). Both German interlocutors spoke at length about alleged security lapses, and Dienstbach indicated he had engaged TSA representatives in similar discussions.

CUSTOMS CONTROLS: POOR LAW ENFORCEMENT OR LABOR DISPUTE?

3. (SBU) In March, German media -- including "Frankfurter Rundschau" (a left-leaning national daily based in Frankfurt), "Spiegel" (the leading national news weekly magazine) and ARD/ZDF (the two largest TV networks) began reporting on Customs controls at Frankfurt Airport. In those reports, anonymous customs employees produced internal documents that purportedly showed customs inspection points going unmanned for days (even during arrivals from high-risk regions), claiming that customs management put revenue collection (duties on cigarettes, alcohol, etc.) and passenger convenience above intercepting traffickers and potential terrorists, under the motto "customs officials are not the police". (NOTE: The German Federal Border Police -- or Bundesgrenzschutz -- which operates under the purview of the MOI, has primary responsibility for border control, including at Germany's airports. END NOTE)

4. (C) Fraport interlocutors indicated they understood the media campaign to be the result of an internal labor dispute involving competing unions, namely the German Customs and Finance Union (Deutsche Zoll und Finanzgewerkschaft, which has traditionally represented airport customs personnel) and the Police Union GdP (Gewerkschaft der Polizei), which wants to take over this representation. Zintel (who asked not to be quoted) implied that leaks to the media and complaints of understaffing and bad management were part of the Police Union's aggressive campaign to gain entry to Customs' works council (labor representation) at the airport.

5. (C) Airport management did note that German Customs (Zollkriminalamt -- ZKA) at the airport still operates "as they did 40 years ago", while police at the airport have modernized considerably. Zintel indicated that Airport Customs head Hartmut Nessler -- a polarizing figure in labor-management disputes at airport Customs -- will depart soon, making way for a new start in the organization.

ALLEGED SECURITY LAPSES

6. (SBU) In the most recent media expose (ref A), ZDF TV newsmagazine "Frontal 21" documented (via hidden cameras) alleged lapses in access controls at Fraport. The video (provided to TSA) shows hidden-camera footage of reporters in off-the-shelf uniforms gaining access (on four consecutive days) to cargo storage, a hangar, and other airfield locations by following vehicles through gates and walking through unlocked doors.

7. (C) Our Fraport interlocutors took issue with the media expose, arguing that reporters falsely claimed to have

penetrated secure airside operations (Fraport says that all areas shown were company-internal workspaces). Fraport coordinates security but its carriers and other customers are responsible for areas under their authority. In one case, Zintel claimed, someone had apparently lodged open a door the night before the hidden camera arrived, suggesting a set-up. Zintel characterized the key witness ZDF used in its report, an attorney, as someone with a vested interest in claiming that anyone can go anywhere at the airport. (NOTE: The attorney in question represents 20 former Fraport employees convicted in 2003 of participation in a cargo theft ring. END NOTE.) Dienstbach said that Fraport management had asked ZDF to amend its report to reflect the above information but had been unsuccessful. (NOTE: "Frontal 21" has aired a series of exposes on airport security, including a report earlier this year on unmanned immigration checkpoints at Munich Airport that prompted the departure of that airport's head of Border Police. END NOTE)

18. (C) Fraport representatives insisted that their security is sound and that the airport complies fully with all regulations but recognize "areas for further improvement." Management reviewed its security procedures following the media reports and found no gaps but established an informal agenda for improvement, including oversight of the approximately 40,000 security passes issued so far -- many to outside contractors and non-airport employees. (NOTE: The May 2004 expose highlighted a former employee who had retained a valid Fraport access card a month after his departure because of his former company's failure to cancel it in a timely fashion. END NOTE.) In June, Fraport brought in its subsidiary ICTS Europe (International Consultants on Targeted Security, one of Europe's leading security providers) to replace a passenger screening contractor that had previously serviced much of the airport.

COMMENT

19. (C) TSA Frankfurt believes that Frankfurt Airport security is adequate, but has incorporated media reports into its ongoing inspections of airport facilities and carriers. While Federal Border Police are the lead agency for airport security, Frankfurt DHS-ICE notes that customs personnel at Frankfurt Airport -- as at many European airports -- often focus on revenue collection more than criminal threats, including terrorism. Although Customs thinking and focus have evolved in light of a changing security environment, the operational transformation is still underway. END COMMENT.
BODDE